

The Sixth Sunday of Easter
09-05-2021
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

- Acts 10: 44-48 Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit and are baptised
- Psalm 98 Shout for Joy to the Lord All the Earth
- 1 John 5:1-12 Faith in the Son of God brings Life - His commands are not burdensome for those who love Him.
- John 15: 9-17 Jesus says - I love you like the Father loves me.
If you love me, you will love one another.

Introduction

Our Gospel reading today leads on directly from the reading of the vine and the branches last week. Last week we heard about what it meant to be a branch that produces fruit. We heard how as branches remaining on the vine we should expect to be pruned. And it's when we are pruned that we are enabled to produce more fruit. But what is the fruit we are to produce?

In the last verse of our gospel reading today Jesus say's this:-

I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Love each other – Gospel references

At the end of the story of the vine and the branches Jesus tells us that we are to love one another. I believe our fruit is shown in how we do this. It is shown in how we are able love one another.

Now, John doesn't just have Jesus tell us to Love one another here. In fact, it is a constant theme throughout all the gospels and the New Testament. Matthew and Mark record Jesus giving the two great commandments which can be summarized like this:-

Love God, Love each other.

In John 13:34-35 Jesus say's this:-

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Loving one another – How and Who

So, we know quite clearly that we are to love one another, and on the face of it this is a very simple thing to say, but it's not such an easy thing to do.

We can immediately be drawn to questions like:-

Who is my brother or sister that I am to love?

and

What does it really mean to love my brother and sister?

Who

Let's look at the who question first. Who are we to love?

As Christians we believe that we are part of the Christian family. Today before we receive Holy Communion we will stand together and affirm the words – We are the body of Christ. If we love Christ, and we are all part of his body, then clearly we are called to love all those in the Christian family.

But what about those who aren't Christian?

We all know the story of the Good Samaritan. When the poor traveller was robbed and left on the side of the road for dead and the priest and the Levite walked by, it was the Samaritan, an enemy of the Jews, who stopped and helped him. Jesus tells us that we are not only to love those who love us. Even sinners do that. As Christians we are called to love even our enemies.

Love your enemies. It's so easy to say, but I think it could be one of the most difficult things we try to achieve.

As Christians we are called to be part of a faith community that models to the world how we love each other. Those outside the Church should see in us a difference in how we love one another. And if we are able to show this love for our Christian brothers and sisters then it should help us to love those outside the circle of our Christian family.

The love of a Christian should never be limited. When we hear about the Holy Spirit coming on the Gentiles in our reading from Acts this morning it is clear that God does not differentiate as to who he loves. Jesus came for all humanity. So, for us the "who" to love seems straight forward.

We are called to love everyone.

How

Let's now try and have a look at the "how" to love? One of the best ways to show those around us that we love them is to be like the patron Saint of our Church – St Cuthbert. Cuthbert was very aware of the presence of God in his life. And he sought to teach and encourage others to know God.

We may not all be able to be great teachers like St Cuthbert, but we can all seek to be aware of God's presence in our lives, and we can all be encouragers of others. If we take the time to be aware of God's presence, as we hear in the reading today, abiding in Jesus, then we will be more and more inclined to be like Jesus.

It would be rare to be in a situation where there wouldn't be someone we could encourage. Unfortunately our natural inclination is often to criticize rather than encourage. This week as you go out from church in love, try to consider who it is you will be able to encourage.

As humans though, there are times when we simply do not agree. This is true within any family situation. There are times when we must do things that may offend one another. Does this mean that we don't love that person? Not if we are keeping the commandments of God. It may mean that we need to find ways of better understanding each other. It may take great prayer on our part to override some of the prejudices or opinions we have. Or it might take great prayer on our part to seek God's wisdom in bringing us together for His sake and His glory.

And sometimes love must do unpleasant things. Sometimes, as the old saying goes, we have to tell the truth in love. There's another saying like this and it's called "tough love". It's often used in the context of dealing with family members who have gone off the rails. I don't have a lot of personal experience, I've been quite blessed in my personal family relationships, so I can't imagine how difficult it is for someone to intervene with a family member they love, but there are times in relationships when this must occur. In such circumstances we can but hand it all to God and seek his enduring love for us and those we have tried to help. God is the healer, and as we do our best to love others, we can only rely on Him.

In the reading from 1 John 5:3-4 this morning it says this:-

"And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world."

As followers of Jesus to love one another should not be a burden. If we love God and he abides in us, then loving others should flow from this.

Conclusion

Now, maybe everything I've said this morning seems too much.

You might be thinking how is it at all possible, that I can love everyone.

You might be thinking that it's certainly going to be a burden to love some of the people I know. And you know what I agree with you.

But I think we need to remember how Jesus loved us. The reality is he loves us so much that he was willing to die on the cross for our sins.

We're never going to get it 100% right. Try as we might to follow the Two Great Commandments, as humans we bound to slip up at times, but Jesus gave his all for us.

Are we willing to give our all for him?

Are we willing to live committed to Jesus and doing our best to love one another, just like he loves us?

Amen.